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ABSTRACT

The frequency of various teaching strategies used by 144 college faculty were investigated, along with faculty perceptions concerning the importance of selected teaching variables. Differences in perceptions of faculty who differ in rank, teaching experience, and school affiliation within the institution's organizational plan were also assessed. Nine instructional methods were rated to determine extent of utilization: audiovisual instruction, computer-assisted instruction, demonstration, individualized instruction, lecture, open discussion, small group instruction, student-centered activity, and teacher-directed discussion. Findings include: small group instruction was used significantly more by associate professors than by assistant professors; the lecture method was used significantly more by individuals with 5 or fewer years of experience; individualized instruction was used significantly more by arts and sciences faculty than by business faculty; clarity was viewed as a significantly less important variable by faculty with more than 20 years experience; and the variable of structuring comments was viewed as significantly more important by faculty with 5 or fewer years of experience. (SW)

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COLLEGIATE INSTRUCTION

SOME DIFFERENCES AMONG FACULTY MEMBERS BASED ON RANK, YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AND SCHOOL AFFILIATION

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Objectives

Two primary objectives of this research were to determine the frequency of various teaching strategies utilized in a collegiate setting and to determine perceptions of college faculty related to the importance of selected teaching variables. A secondary objective was to identify significant differences in perceptions of faculty categorized on the bases of rank, teaching experience, and school affiliation.

Perspective

According to a 1986 Carnegie Report, the quality of teaching in institutions of higher education has diminished. Other critics of higher education imply that the "tide of mediocrity" has risen above the elementary and secondary school level to America's colleges and universities. Efforts toward amelioration of this problem by specific institutions include various research studies aimed at determining the current status of teaching. Traditionally, studies of teaching in higher education have been based on student perceptions (Trent and Cohen, 1973). The validity of these studies has been questioned by numerous educational researchers. If institutions of higher education desire to conduct research aimed at improving instructional practices, an initial step may be to determine faculty perceptions of instructional methods and important teaching variables.

Methods

An instrument was developed by the researchers to ascertain background information, teaching methods utilized, and perceptions of the importance of selected teaching variables. Background items elicited information related to academic rank, years of teaching experience in higher education, and school affiliation within the institution's organizational plan.

Following background data, the second section focused on method utilization. Review of literature significantly contributed to item selection and construction. Three primary sources were: Bergquist, Witt, and Phillips, S.R. "Classroom Structures Which Encourage Student Participation," in a HANDBOOK FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT, 1975; Osterman, D.N. FIVE ALTERNATIVES TO LECTURING IN HIGHER EDUCATION-AN ANALYSIS, 1979; AND Whitman, N. "Teaching Problem-Solving and Creativity in College Courses, " in AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION, 1983. Nine instructional methods were rated to determine extent of utilization: audio-visual instruction, computer-assisted instruction, demonstration, individualized instruction, lecture, open discussion, small group instruction, student-centered activity, and teacher-directed discussion. The range for rating was 1 (never use) to 7 (use very extensively).

The third section ascertained perceptions of the importance of eleven teaching variables. The variables were identified by Rosenshine and Furst (1971) as "most promising" in determining the relationship between teacher behavior and student achievement. These variables, determined by their comprehensive study of teacher behavior research, included: clarity, difficulty of instruction, enthusiasm, praise, probing, structuring comments, student opportunity to learn what is later tested, task-oriented or businesslike behaviors, types of questions, use of student ideas, and variability. Respondents specified five of these variables in rank order that were perceived as most important in their teaching.

The instrument was distributed to all full-time faculty members serving a state-supported college during the 1986-1987 academic year. These 345 faculty members served a student population of 7,631. Completed surveys were returned by 144 individuals.

In regard to academic rank, completed surveys were received from twenty-two instructors, fifty-eight assistant professors, thirty-five associate professors, and twenty-six professors. Three respondents failed to identify rank. Thirty-one of the participants had from zero to five years of teaching experience in higher education; twenty-nine had from six to ten years; forty-eight were in the eleven to twenty year range; and thirty-five were in the category of more than twenty years. One individual failed to identify years of teaching. Participation by schools resulted in sixty-one from Arts and Sciences; twenty-two from Business; twenty-five from Education; eighteen from Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Nursing; and nine from Technology. Nine respondents failed to identify school affiliation. Table I specifies frequencies and percentages for background information.

Results

Frequency tabulations indicated that the lecture method was used more extensively than other methods. Only one faculty member indicated that the lecture method was never used. Thirty-four percent of the faculty reported that they used the lecture method very extensively. At the other end of the utilization continuum was computer-assisted instruction. Almost half of the respondents reported that they never used this method. Preferences for method utilization in descending order were: lecture, teacher-directed discussion, demonstration, student-centered activity, individualized instruction, small group instruction, audio-visual instruction, open discussion, and computer-assisted instruction. Table II identifies specific means for each method.

Faculty members indicated by their ratings of teaching variables that clarity and enthusiasm are important factors. Clarity was rated as one of

the top three by seventy-eight percent of the faculty while enthusiasm was identified as one of the top three variables by seventy-seven percent. The teaching variables in descending rank order of perceived importance were: clarity, enthusiasm, difficulty of instruction, variability, praise, structuring comments, student opportunity to learn what is later tested, types of questions, task-oriented or businesslike behaviors, and use of student ideas. Table III indicates specific means for each variable.

Analyses of variance indicated twenty significant differences at the .05 level between groups categorized on the bases of rank, teaching experience, and school affiliation. One of these differences was based on academic rank, six on years of experience and thirteen on school affiliation. Five of these differences are specified below:

1. Small group instruction was utilized significantly more by associate professors than by assistant professors.

2. The lecture method was used significantly more by individuals with five or fewer years of experience.

3. Individualized instruction was used significantly more by Arts and Sciences faculty than by Business faculty.

4. Clarity was viewed as a significantly less important variable by faculty with more than twenty years experience.

5. The variable, structuring comments, was viewed as significantly more important by faculty with five or fewer years of experience.

Tables IV and V provide additional information related to significant differences between groups.

Educational Importance

This research is limited geographically and in number. Because of these limitations, caution is a prominent feature in generalizing findings

of this study to other populations. Yet, results may be beneficial in two respects. First, findings serve as a foundation from which to structure additional research efforts within the institution related to instructional practices. Second, these results may positively contribute to existing data relative to classroom teaching in colleges and universities.

TABLE I

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

RANK:	Frequency	Percent
Instructor	22	15.3
Assistant Professor	58	40.3
Associate Professor	35	24.3
Professor	26	18.1
Missing	3	2.1

YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE:	Frequency	Percent
0 to 5	31	21.5
6 to 10	29	20.1
11 to 20	48	33.3
More than 20	35	24.3
Missing	1	.7

SCHOOL:	Frequency	Percent
Arts and Sciences	61	42.1
Business	22	15.3
Education	25	17.4
HPERN	18	12.5
Technology	9	6.3
Missing	9	6.3

TABLE II

UTILIZATION OF TEACHING METHODS IN RANK ORDER

Method	Mean*
Lecture	5.50
Teacher-directed discussion	4.99
Demonstration	4.33
Student-centered activity	4.16
Individualized instruction	3.79
Small group instruction	3.68
Audio-visual instruction	3.45
Open discussion	3.40
Computer-assisted instruction	2.28

*Higher means represent a higher degree of utilization

TABLE III

IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING VARIABLES

Variable	Mean*
Clarity	2.42
Enthusiasm	2.70
Difficulty of instruction	4.35
Variability	4.68
Praise	5.02
Structuring comments	5.06
Student opportunity to learn what is later tested	5.08
Types of questions	5.37
Task oriented or businesslike behaviors	5.51
Use of student ideas	5.65

*Lower means represent perceptions of greater importance.

TABLE IV

UTILIZATION OF METHODS

Significant Differences Between Groups Based on Rank

Variable	Direction of Significance
Small group instruction	Assoc. P. > Asst. P.

Significant Differences Between Groups Based on Years Teaching

Variable	Direction of Significance
Lecture	0-5 > 11-20 and 20 or more
Open discussion	20 or more > 0-5

Significant Differences Between Groups Based on School

Variable	Direction of Significance
Lecture	Bus., Tech.,A&S > Educ. Bus. > A&S,HPERN
Open Discussion	Educ.,HPERN > Tech. Educ. > Bus.
Demonstration	A&S,HPERN,Tech. > Bus.
Student-centered activity	A&S > Bus.
Audio-visual instruction	HPERN > Bus.
Computer assisted instruction	Tech. > Bus.,HPERN,A&S
Small group instruction	A&S,Educ.,HPERN > Bus.
Individualized instruction	A&S > Bus.

TABLE V

IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING VARIABLES

Significant Differences in Perceptions of Groups Based on Years Teaching

Variable	Direction of Significance
Clarity	0-5,6-10,11-20 > more than 20
Praise	More than 20 > 0-5
Structuring comments	0-5 > 6-10,11-20,more than 20
Types of questions	More than 20 > 0-5

Significant Differences in Perceptions of Groups Based on School

Variable	Direction of Significance
Clarity	Bus.,A&S > HPERN
Praise	Educ.,A&S,HPERN > Bus.
Student opportunity to learn what is later tested	HPERN,Bus. > A&S
Task oriented or business-like behavior	Tech. > Bus.,Educ.,HPERN,A&S Bus. > A&S
Variability	HPERN > A&S,Bus.,Tech. Educ. > A&S,Bus.,Tech.